

06/29/21 Tuesday

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US Coast Guard Considering Arctic 'FONOPS' to Counter Russian Presence at North Pole
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

The US needs to expand its operations in the Arctic to counter Russia's presence there, the head of the US Coast Guard said on Monday. That could include "freedom of navigation operations" (FONOPS) like the US uses to challenge maritime claims of other nations of which it does not approve.

"Presence equals influence in the Arctic. And right now ... we're woefully lacking as a nation in terms of our capacity," US Coast Guard Commandant Adm. [Karl Schultz](#) told the conservative think tank the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC.

The region is home to considerable natural resources, including an estimated \$1 trillion worth of minerals, one-third of the world's liquefied natural gas (LNG), and rich fishing grounds - much of which has remained untapped due to the harsh climate, permafrost and sea ice. It also holds great travel potential as an alternative to [the Suez Canal](#) or Cape of Good Hope. As climate change increases the region's average temperatures and sends the ice into retreat, global powers are looking to the Arctic as the next place to make their claims - or head off the claims of others.

"What we're concerned about is how [Russia] conducts in this space - the same concerns we have about rules-based international order and adherence, modern maritime governance," Schultz told the think tank, which exerts major influence on US policy-making. "The Coast Guard brings a lot of 'street cred;' we're recognized across the globe as adhering to and modeling those behaviors."

"The Arctic could be one of those potential places for future Freedom of Navigation Operations if they're not a responsible actor up there," he added.

The US has used FONOPS in recent years to challenge what it says are excessive maritime claims, primarily by nations singled out by the Pentagon as US adversaries like Russia, China, Vietnam, and Venezuela. In the Black Sea, Peter the Great Gulf, and South China Sea, FONOPS have led to [dramatic confrontations](#) with nations who claim the waterway as their territorial waters.

The most recent, last week in the Black Sea, saw Russian ships and aircraft fire warning shots at the British destroyer [HMS Defender](#) as it flouted Russian sovereignty over the Crimean peninsula, which voted to rejoin Russia in 2014.

Ironically, the document the US claims to be enforcing - the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea - is an agreement the US has never ratified due to objecting to certain provisions of the document.

In January, the [US Navy released](#) its "strategic blueprint for the Arctic," which laid the foundations for how the US will "continue to provide the right levels and types of presence on, under, and above Arctic water, ensuring America is prepared to compete effectively and

efficiently to maintain favorable balances of power. This includes strengthening cooperative partnerships to ensure coordination with key allies and partners in the region.”

This came several months after the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), another influential Washington-based foreign policy think tank, blasted the US for [having “no coherence”](#) in its Arctic strategy.

“Our strategy ends up being a description of what Russia and China are doing in the Arctic because we are not really able to articulate what we are doing in the Arctic,” Heather Conley, CSIS’ senior vice president for Europe, Eurasia and the Arctic, told [the Washington Times](#) at the time.

“The US does not know what it wants. It does not know what it wants to accomplish. It does not have a positive policy agenda. And the problem is our adversaries know what they want. The strategy is just reacting to what they can do.”

Noting that Russia gets up to one-quarter of its gross domestic product from the region, the Coast Guard chief said Russia has “a hugely large Arctic coastline and they have legitimate access and rights.”

“I don’t want to accuse Russia of doing anything definitively, but I think what we have seen in terms of a propensity to aggressively be present ... is something we need a countering, tempering force for,” he added.

He noted recent flights by Tu-95 and Tu-142 bombers through the region as an example of Russia’s expanding military presence in the Arctic, and [Military.com added](#) in its report on the interview that MiG-31 interceptors have been stationed there, as well.

Neither flying over international waters or basing aircraft on one’s own territory is an inherently provocative act. However, if it were, the US would be equally guilty for having position squadrons of F-22 Raptor and F-35 Joint Strike Fighter stealth aircraft at Alaska’s [Eielson and Elmendorf](#) air bases and for parading its own strategic bomber fleet through the region, as four B-52 Stratofortresses did earlier this month, according to the [US Air Force](#).

He also noted that US President Joe Biden’s 2022 budget request adds \$170 million to the USCG’s \$13 billion budget, which is intended to go toward funding a [fourth heavy icebreaker](#) to the fleet. At present, the Coast Guard has just one heavy icebreaker: the aging USCGC Polar Star, which has been working since 1976.

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DPRK’s Kim Blasts COVID-19 Emergency Response Chiefs for ‘Grave Incident’
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Since the COVID-19 pandemic erupted in late 2019, the nations that have best contained the virus’ spread have been the handful of socialist nations that implemented total lockdowns, while the nations with the highest death rates have been those whose leaders believed lockdowns were worse than the virus’ staggering death toll.

At an expanded meeting of the Workers' Party of Korea's Politburo on Tuesday, party general secretary Kim Jong Un blasted health officials for a lapse in safety concerning the country's tight quarantine against COVID-19.

According to [Yonhap News Agency](#), which cited North Korean media, Kim said this lapse had "caused a grave incident that created a crisis for the safety of the country and the people." He goes on to say that the "incompetence and irresponsibility of the executives" in charge of implementing the country's Emergency Response Plan were at fault. However, the report gives no precise details about what the "grave incident" was.

According to [NK News](#), there have not been any confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), which has maintained a strict quarantine for 515 days. The country has even [pulled its athletes](#) out of the Tokyo Olympic Games over fears they could be exposed to the virus or serve as a vector for it to enter the country. However, rumors abound about [the "truth"](#) and a rumored secret COVID-19 outbreak.

The World Health Organization-run COVAX program is slated to deliver 1.7 million doses of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine to the DPRK, but [as of early June](#), the shipments from South Korea had been repeatedly delayed.

In March, the WPK newspaper [Rodong Sinmun hailed](#) the advent of mass vaccination campaigns, calling the plethora of COVID-19 vaccines "a glimmer of hope for humanity" against the pandemic. However, the paper cautioned that "vaccines are never a universal panacea," hinting that other public health measures must also be used to contain the virus.

Recent experience with the Delta variant has borne the truth of RS' assertions, as nations [reimpose restrictions](#) despite having high vaccination rates. In Israel, the Delta Variant has been found to infect patients already vaccinated against COVID-19.

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NATO's Largest-Ever 'Sea Breeze' Naval Drills Begin in Black Sea Amid HMS Defender Fracas by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

The US and its allies have begun using "freedom of navigation operations" to provoke incidents at sea with Russia, China, and other nations by deliberately sailing their warships through those nations' claimed territorial waters. The US claims to be enforcing the UN Convention on the Laws of the Sea, but it's never ratified the document itself.

The US and 31 allies and partners inaugurated the 21st Sea Breeze exercises in Odessa, Ukraine, on Monday. The drills, positioned immediately off Russia's Crimean coast, are the largest yet and come as Kiev is increasing pressure on NATO to be admitted to the alliance. A ceremony in the Ukrainian port city on Monday declared the opening of the massive drills, which will run until July 10 and feature a variety of nautical exercises, from amphibious warfare and anti-submarine warfare to diving, maritime interdiction operations, air defense, and search and rescue, according to [the US Navy](#).

In addition to the US and Ukraine, 30 other nations are participating, including Albania, Australia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Denmark, Egypt, Estonia, France, Georgia, Greece, Israel,

Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Morocco, Norway, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, Senegal, Spain, South Korea, Sweden, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom. They have collectively contributed 5,000 troops, 32 ships, 40 aircraft and 18 special operations and dive teams.

"The United States is proud to partner with Ukraine in co-hosting the multinational maritime exercise Sea Breeze, which will help enhance interoperability and capabilities among participating nations," Kristina Kvien, Chargé d'Affaires of the US Embassy in Ukraine, said in a [statement last week](#). "We are committed to maintaining the safety and security of the Black Sea."

Ignoring Russian Sovereignty in Crimea

Last week, Russian aircraft and warships acted to deter two different NATO warships in the Black Sea for the Sea Breeze drills from violating Russian territorial waters near Crimea. One incident on June 23 saw the British [destroyer HMS Defender](#) sail within 10 nautical miles of the Crimean coast, violating both Russian territorial integrity and [sea closures associated](#) with Russian military drills. Sukhoi Su-24 naval strike aircraft dropped bombs in front of the Defender to get her attention and an Okhotnik-class patrol boat fired warning shots near Defender, as well.

The Defender claimed to be sailing through Ukrainian waters and to have done nothing wrong because, [according to UK](#) Prime Minister Boris Johnson, "we don't recognize the Russian annexation of Crimea, this is part of a sovereign Ukrainian territory."

Another incident the following day saw Su-24 and Su-30 fighters [scrambled to deter](#) the Dutch frigate Eversten, which had suddenly changed course toward Russian waters.

"Such actions call into question the relevance of the most fundamental document - the Russia-NATO act," Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko said in response. "We proceed from the fact that it must be respected, but the question cannot but arise, how, say, permanent rotation differs from the permanent presence."

With all of the NATO-friendly aircraft in the area, Russia's Black Sea Fleet saw fit to test out its [S-400 Triumf](#) air defense systems, a surface-to-air missile battery that has served as an effective deterrent to Western aircraft in Syria. The Defense Ministry has also said it is keeping a very close eye on the activities of Sea Breeze participants before, during, and after the drills.

Kiev Pushes to Join NATO

Although Ukraine has sought to join the US-led NATO alliance since the 1990s, the administration of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has stepped up the campaign, claiming accession to NATO is the only way to settle the conflict in the Donets River basin and urging NATO nations to protect Ukraine from Russia. Washington and Brussels have signaled that Kiev [could one day join](#) if it sufficiently reforms its political system and civil society to be more democratic.

Earlier this year, Zelenskyy's government [approved a plan](#) for retaking Crimea, where the Crimean Tatar and Russian-speaking majority voted to secede from Ukraine and rejoin Russia in 2014 after the new right-wing nationalist government in Kiev, ushered into power by a US-backed coup, undertook measures attacking the status of the country's large Russian-speaking minority. The same measures set off the crisis in the Russian-speaking Donbas, where several [breakaway "people's republics"](#) rebelled from Kiev's control and defended their independence ever since.

No Western nation [recognizes the Crimean](#) referendum's democratic legitimacy or the autonomy of the Donbas republics, claiming both were engineered by Russia. NATO has used the rebellions to more aggressively push its membership eastward, positioning thousands of troops on the Russian frontier in what it calls an Enhanced Forward Presence.

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Italy Booted From Al-Minhad Base by UAE for Sanctions Over Yemen War - Report
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Italian military personnel have reportedly been given until the end of the week to totally withdraw their deployment at the United Arab Emirates' Al-Minhad air base in retaliation for sanctions against Abu Dhabi and Riyadh for their war in Yemen.

The Emirati foreign ministry has made no official comment on the eviction, but [Defense News reported](#) over the weekend that Matteo Perego Di Cremnago, an Italian member of parliament and member of the parliamentary defense commission, had told the outlet the Italians must be out by July 2.

However, it was reported earlier this month by [Agence France-Presse](#) that the Italian foreign ministry had summoned Abu Dhabi's envoy to Rome for answers after the UAE denied an Italian military aircraft access to Emirati airspace. The aircraft was helping to withdraw Italian forces from Afghanistan as part of the NATO pullout.

The minister "conveyed to the ambassador his surprise and strong disappointment for a gesture that is hard to understand," a statement from Rome said.

[According to Al-Monitor](#), Abu Dhabi's move is directly related to a January decision by Rome to halt arms sales to both the UAE and Saudi Arabia due to the Saudi-led alliance's conduct in Yemen, where it has been waging a brutal war against Ansarullah, also known as the Houthi movement, since 2015.

"This is an act that we considered necessary, a clear message of peace coming from our country. For us, the respect of human rights is an unbreakable commitment," Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio said at the time. [According to TRT World](#), the decision deprived the coalition of nearly 20,000 missiles, part of a \$485 million deal signed in 2016.

Abu Dhabi officially withdrew from the war in 2019, but it retains considerable influence over the many rebel groups it has trained and supplied, many of which are not necessarily allied with the pro-Saudi government-in-exile of President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi.

Italy's move coincided with a temporary pause by newly inaugurated US President Joe Biden in weapons sales to Saudi Arabia and the UAE agreed to by the preceding administration of Donald Trump. However, by April the sales had resumed, which [according to Reuters](#) total more than \$235 billion and include some of the [most advanced weaponry](#) in the US arsenal, such as the F-35 stealth fighter.

A [United Nations estimate](#) in December put the number of dead in the Yemen war at more than 233,000, most of whom have died due to indirect causes such as lack of food, water, or access

to adequate medical care. Weapons supplied to the UAE [have been found](#) in the hands of various rebel forces inside Yemen, including Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

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NSA Says Tucker Carlson's Allegations He Is Agency Target 'Untrue'
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Tucker Carlson, the 52-year-old host of Fox News' "Tucker Carlson Tonight," alleged during his Monday broadcast that the US Department of Defense's National Security Agency (NSA) is "spying on him" and monitoring the opinion show's electronic communications in an effort to get the show canceled.

The NSA issued a statement on Tuesday decrying Carlson's Monday night allegations of government surveillance.

"On June 28, 2021, Tucker Carlson alleged that the National Security Agency has been 'monitoring our electronic communications and is planning to leak them in an attempt to take this show off the air,'" the US intelligence agency said in a statement.

"This allegation is untrue," the NSA claimed. "Tucker Carlson has never been an intelligence target of the Agency and the NSA has never had any plans to try to take his program off the air." The US intelligence agency went on to emphasize that it "has a foreign intelligence mission," and would not target an American citizen, except in a case such as "an emergency."

"NSA may not target a US citizen without a court that explicitly authorizes the targeting," the NSA statement concluded.

The intelligence agency's denial comes less than 24 hours after Carlson claimed a Washington-affiliated whistleblower disclosed the alleged NSA surveillance on "Tucker Carlson Tonight."

"It's not just political protesters the government is spying on, yesterday, we heard from a whistleblower within the US government who reached out to warn us that the NSA ... is monitoring our electronic communications and is planning to leak them in an attempt to take this show off the air," he remarked on Monday.

"Now, that's a shocking claim and ordinarily would be skeptical of it. It's illegal for the NSA to spy on American citizens. It's a crime," Carlson added. "The whistleblower who is in a position to know repeated back to us information about a story that we are working on that could have only come directly from my texts and emails. There's no other possible source for that information -- period."

Former US President Donald [Trump weighed in on Carlson's comments](#) during a Tuesday appearance on the Clay Travis and Buck Sexton Show, a conservative talk radio program that replaced the timeslot of late radio host and political provocateur Rush Limbaugh.

"I think it's true. It's totally believable," he said of Carlson's allegations against the NSA.

The former US president then went on to agree with Sexton about how even he was "targeted by the deep state" during his presidential campaign.

While the NSA and White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki have asserted to the public that the NSA's mission relates to "foreign threats," and not that of private citizens, former NSA agent-turned-whistleblower Edward [Snowden notably exposed information on PRISM](#) - the code-name of an NSA surveillance program that allowed the government to collect information on private US citizens via hidden warrants.

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GOP Snubs Andrew Giuliani, Props Up Rep. Lee Zeldin as 'Presumptive Nominee' in NY Governor's Race
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Andrew Giuliani, the 35-year-old son of former New York City Mayor and Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani, announced in May that he would be vying for the GOP nomination in the upcoming 2022 New York gubernatorial election. Giuliani most recently served as associate director of the Office of Public Liaison in the Trump administration.

Members of the New York Republican State Committee assembled earlier this week to hold a closed-door straw poll on their preferred nominee for the upcoming election against Andrew Cuomo (D), the incumbent governor of New York.

During the Monday meeting, New York GOP leaders overwhelmingly supported Rep. Lee Zeldin (R-NY), with 85% of the committee backing the 41-year-old lawmaker, [according to results](#) made public on social media.

Zeldin, now the "presumptive nominee," was trailed by Rob Astorino, a former Westchester County, New York, executive who only received 5% of the committee vote.

The remaining 10% of the New York GOP leaders abstained from voting.

Andrew Giuliani, who [previously asserted](#) politics is in his "DNA," failed to receive a single vote from the committee, and took to Twitter to loosely address the results.

"Proud to be the FAVORITE of The 2.9 Million Registered New York Republicans!!!" [Giuliani tweeted Tuesday morning](#). "We are the Peoples Candidate!!!!!! Together WE WILL TAKE DOWN Andrew Cuomo on Nov.8th, 2022."

On Sunday, the 35-year-old told the New York Post that he is the "strongest candidate to defeat Cuomo" while citing a recent Triton Polling & Research survey of 587 New York Republicans. [According to the data](#), recorded June 24 through June 25, showed Giuliani with 35.2% of the vote, compared to 27.2% of respondents backing Zeldin.

John McLaughlin, a campaign pollster for Zeldin, abruptly panned the "robocall" survey referenced by Giuliani.

"This is not a poll," he said. "Giuliani is not being honest with the Republican county leaders by putting out these robocall results before their meeting."

Nevertheless, Giuliani, a former aide to then-US President Donald Trump, is scheduled to have at least two upcoming fundraisers, including a June 29 event at Empire Steak House in New York City's Midtown Manhattan neighborhood. The Midtown restaurant recently served as the

celebratory venue for Curtis Sliwa, the GOP's nominee for the 2021 New York City mayoral election.

Astorino, who managed to get a sliver of committee votes, similarly [emphasized in a Twitter post](#) that it will be "the [Republican] voters, not the party insiders" who will decide who the GOP candidate.

"The early straw poll is meaningless and eventually I'll be the straw that breaks Cuomo's back next November, and the one who'll rescue and rebuild our state," the former county executive declared.

The so-called presumptive nominee, on the other hand, happily accepted the New York GOP leaders' approval.

"Since announcing our candidacy for Governor, together we've built a groundswell of support inside and outside of politics from every corner of our state," Zeldin [wrote in a Monday statement](#), following the GOP vote. "For so many New Yorkers, this is a last chance to Save Our State, to return New York from the brink and restore it to glory."

The US congressman from New York asserted that the GOP leaders' overwhelming support "underscores that the Republican Party is united" to win the 2022 New York gubernatorial election.

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House Dems Urge Increased Pentagon Spending for Weapons Procurement in FY 2022
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Last month, the US Department of Defense issued Congress a \$715 billion budget request for Fiscal Year 2022, amounting to a 2% uptick in defense spending from the previous year. The move comes as the Pentagon has shifted its focus to Indo-Pacific operations that seek to counter China's growing influence.

The US House Appropriations Committee on Tuesday released a draft of its Pentagon funding bill, calling, in part, for an approximate increase of \$1.7 billion in weapons procurement from [US President Joe Biden's proposed budget](#), as well as an approximate budget decrease of \$1.6 billion in research, development, test and evaluation (RDT&E).

Overall, the \$705.939 billion defense spending bill for FY 2022 amounts to \$9.978 billion increase over its 2021 counterpart. Comparatively, Biden put forward a budget proposal [totaling some \\$715 billion](#).

The draft bill, drawn up by Democratic lawmakers, has been endorsed by US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, according to the release.

Defense Chair Betty McCollum (D-MN) emphasized in a Tuesday statement that Democratic US lawmakers must continue to support "important investments in modernization" to enhance the nation's strength.

Per the draft bill, lawmakers seek to designate some \$110.4 billion for the RDT&E of new technologies and equipment for "tomorrow's challenges." The recommendation amounts to a \$3.2 billion increase from FY 2021.

The bill proposes that around \$2.1 billion of said RDT&E funds be designated for the US' costly F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program, as well as an additional \$2.9 billion to fund the "continued development" of the US Air Force's B-21 bomber.

The reallocation of funds comes as [Washington seeks to counter China](#) and expand its presence in the [Indo-Pacific region](#).

"The Defense Appropriations bill provides resources requested by the Secretary of Defense to protect our national security, maintain a strong industrial base to support good-paying jobs, and counter the rising threats from our adversaries, including China," House Appropriations Committee Chair Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) said in a quoted statement.

While the committee's budget draft calls for \$134.3 billion for weapons and equipment procurement - a \$2.2 billion decrease from FY 2022 - the Democratic lawmakers are notably pushing Biden for \$1.7 billion in procurement funding.

The Appropriations Committee's defense subcommittee is slated to take on the draft during a closed session on Wednesday.

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Trump's Alabama Rally Canceled Over Concerns Event Will Become 'Too Partisan'
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Since parting from the Oval Office, former US President Donald Trump has tiptoed around the subject of running for the White House once again, opting to mostly toy with the public on the matter. Without yet offering any confirmation on a potential bid, Trump has maintained his campaign-style rallies.

An upcoming rally that was meant to have Trump as its keynote speaker in Mobile, Alabama, has been called off over concerns that the weekend event would become overtly partisan, it was recently revealed.

The rally was meant to be held on July 3 at the USS Alabama Battleship Memorial Park with the belief that the festivities would serve as a patriotic event to mark the US' Independence Day, a federal holiday celebrated throughout the extended weekend.

Bill Tunnel, who serves as the commission chairman for the park, [told](#) local station WPXI that the Saturday speaking engagement was nixed after park commissioners realized that the celebratory event was beginning to turn into a "partisan political event."

"After the request was made, then there was contact with the Republican Party," Tunnell recalled. "[Party officials] contacted us and then it became apparent that it was going to be a partisan political event, rather than just a patriotic event planned for that evening."

In late May, commissioners moved to obtain an opinion from the attorney general's office on the event; however, as there was insufficient time for a formal declaration, Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall dispatched a letter instead. The correspondence declared the park can be used for political events, so long as access is made "available for all political parties and candidates on an equal basis."

In light of the decision to cancel the speaking event, John Wahl, who serves as the chairman of the Alabama Republican Party, told the outlet that the former commander-in-chief has relayed that he is disappointed with the cancellation.

The Saturday event would have marked yet another campaign-style rally for the former president, who is scheduled to host his second post-presidency rally in Tampa, Florida, over the weekend. Trump's [first rally](#) after splitting from the White House was held in Ohio in late June. With speculation running wild over claims that Gov. Kay Ivey (R-AL) was at the root of the event's cancellation, the governor's spokesperson, Gina Maiola, relayed to the [Yellowhammer News](#) that the state official "did not get involved" in the matter, and was "fully supportive" of Trump.

"The battleship commissioners approached our office out of concern of a statute that says you cannot use state property for political purposes," Maiola explained. "The governor and her team expressed that that law would not bar this event from happening and encouraged them to seek an opinion from the attorney general."

The last political event that was hosted at the park was for former Sen. Rick Santorum's (R-PA) presidential campaign in 2012. Tunnel told the local station that Santorum was the "straw that broke the camel's back" when it came to the commission's decision to bar public partisan events at the site.

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Germany Removes All Troops From Afghanistan, Ends Near 20-Year Military Stay
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Ahead of the confirmation, German officials had mostly kept mum on details stemming from the troop removal process, with Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer previously telling reporters that withdrawal procedures were being conducted in an orderly manner.

Germany officially removed its last remaining service members from Afghanistan on Tuesday, marking an end to the nation's near 20-year military stay in the Middle Eastern country.

The troop removal was declared by both German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer and the Bundeswehr, Germany's unified armed forces.

A [release](#) issued by the Bundeswehr details that the last German troops officially departed from Afghanistan at approximately 9:24 p.m. local time, and are scheduled to stopover in Tbilisi, Georgia, before touching back down in Germany on Wednesday.

Estimates suggest the Tuesday operation saw the removal of nearly 600 service members. Additionally, the Bundeswehr release states military officials will now be working toward redeploying nearly 800 containers of equipment, which includes some 120 vehicles and six helicopters.

"This is the end of a historical chapter - an intensive effort that has challenged and shaped us," Kramp-Karrenbauer remarked in a [statement](#).

Troops are expected to undergo a mandatory two-week quarantine after returning to Germany as part of ongoing efforts to curb the spread of the COVID-19 Delta variant.

Since the start of Germany's near 20-year military presence in Afghanistan, the European country held the second-largest contingent of troops after the US, having deployed some 160,000 troops to the region. Many troops who were deployed served more than one military tour.

A total of 59 German soldiers were killed in Afghanistan. Germany's mission proved to be the deadliest military operation since World War 2, as well as the most expensive after having cost taxpayers upwards of \$15 billion.

Earlier, [reports indicated](#) that German officials intended to wrap up their ongoing troop removal process by July 4. At the time, it was reported that roughly 1,100 German soldiers remained in the country.

The latest development comes as the US is in the midst of its own troop withdrawal from Afghanistan. US President Joe Biden has set a goal of removing soldiers by September 11, the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks.

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Death Toll From Florida Building Collapse Rises to 12, Mayor Reveals
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

The 12-story Champlain Towers South Condo in Surfside, Florida, collapsed overnight on June 24 for unknown reasons. Reports have suggested the building was affected by a bevy of structural issues for years.

The death toll stemming from the partial collapse of the Champlain Towers South Condo has risen to 12, officials involved in the ongoing investigation revealed late Tuesday.

Miami-Dade Mayor Daniella Levine Cava [told reporters](#) that investigators involved in sifting through rubble at the Surfside site recovered one additional body from the scene since the [Monday update](#) given to the public.

The official added that 149 individuals remain unaccounted for, with the number of accounted residents hitting 125.

Levine Cava further revealed that authorities are in the midst of putting together an audit that will offer "a more accurate, finalized number" of individuals who remain unaccounted and accounted. "This is a slow and methodical process," she underscored, calling for patience from the public.

Reiterating past remarks, the Miami-Dade mayor once again stated that figures are still very "fluid" as rescue efforts are now going into the sixth day.

The latest update from officials came as Miami-Dade State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle announced that she would be calling on a grand jury to examine the demolition-like building collapse, specifically pinpointing on what safeguards can be implemented in the future to prevent such an incident.

The effort will also see the grand jury tasked with determining grounds for a potential criminal investigation, and come alongside an examination by the federal National Institute of Standards and Technology.

As rescue efforts continue, varying reports have suggested that the building's partial collapse may have stemmed from ongoing water issues and crumbling structural columns, among other issues. A letter sent to residents of the building in April touched on much-needed renovations, explaining that the estimated cost for the work was in the ballpark of roughly [\\$16 million](#).

US President Joe Biden and first lady Jill Biden are expected to travel to Surfside on Thursday to survey the site.

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Situation Room Showdown - Cartoon

Former US President Donald Trump's response to racial-justice protests in 2020 proved controversial, as many were left stunned after the one-term commander-in-chief tapped violent methods to shutter demonstrations. In fact, at one point protesters were forcibly pushed away from White House barriers for a Trump photo-op outside a nearby church.

New excerpts from an upcoming book by Wall Street Journal reporter Michael Bender recently revealed that Trump engaged in a full-blown shouting match with Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at the height of nationwide protests.

The forthcoming book, titled "Frankly, We Did Win This Election," [details](#) that the eyebrow-raising dispute broke out in the White House Situation Room, and concerned command authority as Trump sought Milley to squash protests.

"I said you're in f***ing charge!" Trump reportedly shouted at Milley, who allegedly "yelled" back at Trump that he was "not in charge." The tense exchange, which unfolded before a team of officials, including former Attorney General Bill Barr and former Defense Secretary Mark Esper, saw Trump later yell back that Milley "can't f***ing talk to me like that."

Although Bender has stated that the shouting match was confirmed by "multiple senior administration officials," Trump told the outlet that the claims were "totally fake news." Milley has yet to address the allegations.

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Moderna Says COVID-19 Vaccine Performing Well Against Delta Variant as Strain Raises Concerns
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

The delta variant, also known as B.1.617.2, was first detected in India, and has since become one of the more concerning strains that mutated from SARS-CoV-2, the deadly virus that causes COVID-19. It presently makes up about 20% of the novel coronavirus cases in the US. Pharmaceutical manufacturer Moderna announced on Tuesday that the agency's COVID-19 vaccine appeared to perform well in a lab setting against variants of the respiratory illness, including the highly contagious delta strain.

The Massachusetts-based firm revealed in a [news release](#) that the mRNA vaccine successfully produced neutralizing antibodies after two doses when tested against the delta, beta and eta COVID-19 strains. However, researchers did note the vaccine did not perform as well when tested against versions of South Africa's beta variant.

The lab test results, which have not yet been peer reviewed, were based on the blood serum of eight individuals one week after they received their second dose of the Moderna vaccine.

Although Moderna's data proves promising, it has been noted that the results may not reflect how the vaccine will perform in real-world scenarios.

"As we seek to defeat the pandemic, it is imperative that we are proactive as the virus evolves," Stéphane Bancel, CEO of Moderna, said in a statement accompanying the Tuesday release.

"These new data are encouraging and reinforce our belief that the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine should remain protective against newly detected variants."

Bancel underscored that "these findings highlight the importance of continuing to vaccinate populations with an effective primary series vaccine."

The company's declaration came on the same day that Moderna's vaccine was granted an Emergency Use Authorization in India, where the delta variant has prompted COVID-19 cases to skyrocket.

The findings also came on the heels of a recent [Axios-Ipsos poll](#) that determined some 72% of American adults are becoming increasingly concerned with the delta variant, of which 36% agreed to being extremely concerned.

The poll also found that even although many US adults are aware of the contagious strain, many have steered away from changing their habits to include more precautionary measures, such as avoiding crowds or adhering to masking protocols.

Approximately 55% of respondents indicated that they are wearing a mask "at all times" after leaving their home, marking a 13-point decline from a previous survey conducted earlier this month.

The delta variant, present in at least 92 countries, is expected to become the dominant COVID-19 strain as the cases of the variant have been doubling about every two weeks. In the US, delta is accounting for 20% of cases.

Backing away from comments made by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, officials with the World Health Organization have [urged individuals](#) to continue to follow COVID-19 prevention methods, including those who have been fully vaccinated against the virus.

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US Private Sector Added 692,000 Jobs in June - ADP Data

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - The US private sector added 692,000 jobs in June as labor market recovery from the coronavirus pandemic remained robust, especially in the services sector, the ADP National Employment Report said Wednesday.

"The labor market recovery remains robust, with June closing out a strong second quarter of jobs growth," ADP chief economist Nela Richardson, said in a statement, announcing the jobs gain of 692,000 after the addition of 886,000 private sector jobs in May.

The ADP data came before the June non-farm payrolls report due from the Labor Department on Friday that would include figures for both private and government sector employment.

ADP said that while private sector payrolls were still nearly 7 million short of pre-COVID-19 levels, the sector has added about 3 million jobs since the beginning of this year.

"Service providers, the hardest hit sector, continue to do the heavy lifting, with leisure and hospitality posting the strongest gain as businesses begin to reopen to full capacity across the country," Richardson said.

More than a year into the COVID-19 crisis, restoring job growth remains one of the biggest challenges of US policymakers.

The United States lost more than 21 million jobs between March and April 2020, at the height of business lockdowns forced by the coronavirus. At least 7 million of those jobs have yet to return, officials say.

Economists polled by US media expect the Labor Department to announce a June jobs growth of 690,000 in the non-farm payrolls report, adding to May's expansion of 559,000.

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More Bodies Discovered Under Rubble of Collapsed Building in Florida – Israeli Commander

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) – Rescue personnel have discovered more bodies and tunnels under the rubble of the collapsed building in Surfside, Florida as the search for surviving residents entered the sixth day, Commander of the Israeli National Rescue Unit Colonel Golan Vach told CNN on Wednesday.

"At the last 12 hours we found some more people. Unfortunately, they are not alive," Vach said. The rescuers on the scene also found new tunnels inside the rubble overnight and more bodies while working in the space between the collapsed balconies, Vach said.

"These tunnels that we found right now were almost the first to be big enough to enable people to stay between them. Most of the collapse is very, very tight. The collapse was major."

Vach added there was only "very minor" hope of finding any survivors under the ruins of the collapsed 12-story building.

On Tuesday, Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava told reporters the death toll in last Thursdays' collapse of the Surfside, Florida, apartment building had increased to 12, with 149 people still unaccounted for.

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RPT: PREVIEW - Trump Joining Texas Governor on Visit to US Southern Border to View Crisis

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump will be joining Republican Texas Governor Greg Abbott on a tour of the US-Mexico border on Wednesday to call attention to the immigration crisis in the region.

Trump has expressed frustration with the Biden administration rolling back his strict immigration policies, such as the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) program, which helped deter the flow of migrants to the United States. However, the current administration continues to leave in place the former president's public health policy, known as Title 42, which allows US immigration authorities to immediately turn most migrants and their families away at the border.

Trump and Abbott will reportedly visit the area around the Texas border town of Edinburg, Texas, headquarters of what US immigration enforcement has dubbed the Rio Grande Valley sector, the longtime hotspot for the seasonal immigration crisis.

"Securing the border is not just important to Texas - it is vital to America," Abbott said in a statement on Tuesday. "Tomorrow President Trump will join me and law enforcement officials for a border security briefing in Weslaco [Texas]."

The state of Texas recently authorized \$250 million to be used to begin building more border wall as part of the governor's mission to stem illegal immigration and drug trafficking.

Texas and Mexico share a 1,254-mile border, but there are many gaps where migrants can easily bypass the steel bollard fencing.

President Joe Biden, in one of his first actions as US president, issued an executive order to halt all border wall projects that were carried over from the Trump administration. Trump was

able to construct 400 miles of the large steel wall structure despite long court battles and opposition from Democrats in Congress.

On Monday, Abbott posted a video of a tractor clearing shrub on land somewhere along the Texas-Mexico border in order to prepare it for the building process, however, he pointed out they have yet to hire a program manager to oversee the project.

On Friday, Vice President Kamala Harris made a trip to the Texas border town of El Paso after facing much criticism for not making the trip sooner after Biden put her in charge of handling the border crisis.

The vice president faced more backlash for not visiting the Rio Grande Valley region in south Texas, where hundreds of thousands of asylum-seeking migrants from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Mexico have been pouring into the United States.

US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) data revealed earlier this month that the number of asylum-seeking migrants apprehended along the southern border with Mexico in May set another record, reaching a new 21-year monthly high of 180,034. More than 929,868 migrants have been apprehended for illegally crossing the US-Mexico border since October, putting the Biden administration on pace to break the previous annual record of 977,509 set in 2019.

The United States has apprehended more than 1.5 million illegal migrants at the southern border with Mexico in 1986, 1996, 1998-2000, according to CBP data.

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RPT - 'I See That Day in My Dreams Every Night': US D-Day Vet Shares Terrible Moments of WWII

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - The month of June marks a number of dates celebrating battle victories in Europe during the Second World War, among the most outstanding of which is the Normandy landings of the Allied troops on what is known as D-Day.

US World War II veteran Frank DeVita participated in the Allied invasion of Normandy, France on June 6, 1944, and recently shared his memories of the war.

"I go back to Europe many times, and every time I go back, I go to Normandy and there's a cemetery there and it's got all the dead bodies. And I go there every year and I cry and I cry and I cry," DeVita told Sputnik.

DeVita said he still has nightmares about D-Day, and the horrifying moments of the war.

"I dream every night, and most of the time [about] the war," DeVita said. "It brings back bad memories. And I can't sleep, and I cry during the night... to me it's that day on the beach, it's still that same day on the beach."

DeVita noted that for 70 years after D-Day, he never talked about it.

"It was too horrible, and I didn't want to bring it back to my family," he said, noting that he started talking about those tragic events in an interview with TV journalist Tom Brokaw only a few years ago, upon visiting the Omaha beach. "I didn't tell anybody. For 70 years. I never told my wife and I never told my friends. I never told anybody. It was so horrible. I didn't want to talk about it."

ENTERING THE WAR

Frank DeVita was only 16 years old when World War II hit the shores of America. At that time, he was playing baseball and was a Boy Scout.

He learned that the War broke out while listening to a football game between the New York Giants and the New York Dodgers.

"They were talking and said: The Japanese have just bombed Pearl Harbor. That's the first time I knew of it. That would have been December 7, 1941," the veteran said.

He tried to join right after the Pearl Harbor attack but was too young.

"I needed my mom's signature, but she would not sign until I graduated from high school," DeVita said, explaining that he was only 16 then and had to wait until he turned 18 years old to join.

The veteran went on to say that when he was old enough, he joined the US Coast Guard.

DeVita also said 17 boys from his high school decided to join the services.

"Who went to the army, who went to the Navy, who went to the Marines. And we went down and we went at the same time. 17 people from high school, from my high school," he added.

Frank pointed out that while he joined because of the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, they sent him to the Atlantic as opposed to the Pacific.

"After the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, I wanted to get even with them and it is very ironic. When I got in the service, I went to Europe, not Japan," he said.

DeVita served on the USS Samuel Chase, which was a Navy built ship, but was US Coast Guard-manned.

"Those type of ships were called attack transport," he added. "So, they brought in the troops to Normandy. What a lot of people don't know is that it was the Coast Guard that delivered the troops into Omaha Beach and Utah Beach on D-Day for the Americans."

DeVita's father served in the US Army in World War I. And in World War II, Frank's older brother, Silvio, served as a medic in the US Third Army.

D-DAY HORRORS

"It was June 6, the invasion of Europe," DeVita recalled. "On June 6, I was on the ship and we had little boats called LCV's [Landing Craft Vehicle, Personnel] and we went onto the beach at Normandy."

These are the famous Higgins Boats, used to bring in troops to beach landings.

DeVita explained that they had 30 army soldiers on these Higgins boats, and his job was to lower the steel ramp on the boat, allowing the soldiers to disembark and head onto the beach. In the morning, his ship brought in army soldiers from the US Army 1st Division, nicknamed "The Big Red One", and then later on in the day, the US Army 29th division.

"At 4 o'clock in the morning, we started seeing the troops and at six o'clock in the morning, we landed on the beach, Omaha beach," DeVita said. "All the transports were 11 miles from the beach. And the reason for that is that Germans had a gun called the 88. And it had a range of 10 miles. So, we stayed 11 miles out."

DeVita and two other men from the Chase were running the Higgins boat. One of the other two was the coxswain who steered the boat.

"The other guy when we landed, he put out the anchor or the rope so we could get pulled in," he said. "My job was the ramp."

DeVita's job was to drop the ramp when the boat got near to the beach and then lift it after the American soldiers left the boat.

"In the front of the boat, there was a ramp. It's like a big garage door and it's made of reinforced steel. And the ramp which you hold back when machine guns fire and single-fire they could bounce off the ramp," he said. "That was my job: either raise or lower the ramp."

On the first wave, he added, they had 30 soldiers on.

"And when I dropped the ramp, machine gun bullets that were bouncing off the ramp came into the boat and killed 15 soldiers," DeVita continued to say. "Three of them got off the boat and they made it to the beach. But as soon as they got on the beach, they were machine gunned to death."

DeVita said the Germans had 33 machine guns on the shore, while above the beach there were a lot more machine guns and 88's.

"So, we were caught in the crossfire," he said.

DeVita recalled that the sea was very, very rough, and they lost six boats from the Chase at Omaha beach, and were then left with 15.

The veteran noted that he made fifteen runs or waves, originally bringing in troops, and then around the 8th or 9th wave he was taking the dead bodies and wounded off the beach on the way back.

"After the first run, we had to go back to the ship and pick up another load of soldiers, 30 more. And then we did that, over and over and over again," he said.

DeVita said they had a lot of wounded aboard the boat.

"On the way back to my ship, there was a hospital ship and we dropped off wounded. And the dead we took back to my ship," he said.

DeVita then shared the most frightening moment of that day.

"When the machine guns started firing. It was like a swarm of angry bees all around me. I didn't want to die. I was scared," he said. "And the guy next to me died, and the guy next to me died, and the guy... at the end of the day, we lost 2,000 people."

WWII BATTLES

DeVita said after June 6th, he stayed three days off the beach and took the wounded and the dead with them. Then, they went back to the ship's home base, which was in Glasgow, Scotland.

"We lost a lot of boats, so we had to replace the boats," he went on to say. "And then we got ready for the second invasion, which was August 15th, in Southern France. Marseille."

DeVita said that he brought the US Third Division into Marseille.

"In comparison to Normandy it was a piece of cake," the veteran stressed. "Because there wasn't that many people firing at us and a lot of people that were firing at us were not Germans, they were Polish and Russian prisoners of war that were forced into the German army."

They went back to Glasgow, he added, to put the Chase in ship shape where they were told they would be going to the Pacific.

"I went to the Pacific, through the Panama Canal, I went to Pearl Harbor, and then we took troops," he said. "I didn't do the actual invasion of the Philippines, but I did bring troops into the invasion."

After the Philippines, Frank's WWII service continued in Okinawa.

"We were supposed to do the invasion of Okinawa, but unfortunately we had an accident on our boatship and we had to go back to the United States for repairs," he added. "So, we never made

the actual invasion. But when we came back, that's when the Japanese had all the Kamikazes. We survived two Kamikaze attacks."

FAMILY AND FRIENDS DURING WAR

DeVita said the thoughts of his family, especially his mother's, kept him alive during the toughest times, including on D-Day.

"I didn't want to die [because] if I died, my mother would have gotten a telegram: 'Mrs. DeVita, sorry to tell you your son has died.' And that's why I stayed alive. My mom kept me alive," he said.

DeVita noted that during the War, while he was away, his mother used to go to the church and rolled bandages for the troops. He remembers fondly receiving letters and packages from back home.

"They were very nice," he said. "I probably wrote a bunch of letters back. I wanted to stay in touch with them, even though I was far away. I wanted to be with them."

DeVita also recalled actual Victory Day.

"It was May 8th. I was aboard my ship. And the notice came over the loudspeaker: the Germans surrendered," DeVita recalled. "That's how we got the news that Germany surrendered. We went bananas. We went crazy, you know, hugging one another and kissing one another and we were so happy that the war was over in Germany."

RETURNING BACK HOME

"When I got home, you know, I saw in the movies when the soldiers came home, they had a big party for them, everything else. When I got home, there was nobody there, nobody to greet me," he said.

His father who worked for the Navy was at work.

"My sister was a nurse. My little brother was out playing baseball and I couldn't find my mother," he said. "So I went to the neighbor next door; she was Italian and the first thing she said: 'you need something to eat?' So I said, 'no, I'm looking for my mom.' She says, 'Your mom, she's at the church rolling bandages,' so I went all the way to the church."

At the church he said he saw "a big circle of women and my mom had her back to me."

"The women were looking at me, they were all like 'Ooooh,'" he added. "And my mom didn't know what was going on. She turned around. She saw me and fainted right away."

Then, DeVita added, they got on the phone and called all the neighbors, friends and relatives, and then had a "big, big party."

DeVita also said he stayed in touch with friends he made during the war, and starting in 2014 went to Normandy to participate in D-Day anniversaries, until recently when his failing health has precluded his travels.

"We met some very, very wonderful people in France, and they used to take me into their house and make a big meal for me and I kept in touch with those people," he said.

Today, DeVita lives in his house and goes every week to the cemetery to visit his wife's grave.

"I have a big house. And I used to cut the lawn and plow the snow; painted every room. It takes a lot of work to maintain a house. And eight years ago, I lost the most precious thing of my life. My wife died eight years ago. And my whole life changed," he said.

They knew each other since the age of 5. They were neighbors in Brooklyn.

"We went to kindergarten together. So I knew her all my life. I miss her. I miss her. I go every Friday to the cemetery, and I talk to her and I tell her what's going on that week. I know she doesn't hear me, but I hear me. It makes me feel better," he added.

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Huawei CFO Lawyers Say HSBC's Knowledge of Tech Giant's Ties to Iran 'Fatal' to US Case

TORONTO, June 29 (Sputnik) - Documents obtained from HSBC's Hong Kong operations reveal that the bank's executives knew about Huawei's ties to Iran, a fatal blow to the United States' extradition case against the tech firm giant's CFO Meng Wanzhou, the executive's lawyers argued in a Canadian court.

In April, the High Court of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region ordered HSBC, which Meng is alleged by the US Justice Department to have defrauded, to release additional documents to the executive's defense team and to Canadian government prosecutors representing the Attorney General of Canada (AGC), which is representing the US.

The defense is arguing that the over 300 pages of documents obtained from HSBC reveal that senior executives knew that Skycom's accounts with the multinational financial conglomerate were controlled by Huawei.

The Justice Department alleges that Meng committed fraud by misleading HSBC into approving more than \$100 million in transactions that contravened US sanctions on Iran from 2010 to 2014. Skycom is alleged to have acted as a shell company for Huawei in its transactions with Iran.

"This new evidence consists of reliable... contemporaneous, business records from the purported victim, HSBC, that capable of potentially demonstrating that the narrative presented by the requesting state [US], and the evidence summaries in support of that evidence, are so defective as to compel the court to place no reliability on them based on manifest on reliability," Mark Sandler told BC Supreme Court justice Heather Holmes on Tuesday.

Sandler added that for the first time in the proceedings Meng is on "equal footing" with the United States and that the alleged fraud charges are "implicated fatally by the new evidence." Meng's legal counsel clarified that his assessment pertains only to the extradition matter, and not the US Justice Department's case against Meng, as government prosecutors have contended.

Furthermore, the documents show that HSBC went as far as to dissolve Skycom's accounts in order salvage HSBC's reputation, once executives learned of the Huawei's role through media reports, Sandler said.

Meng, the daughter of Huawei founder and CEO Ren Zhengfei, was arrested on December 1, 2018 at Vancouver International Airport during a layover stop at the request of the US government.

Meng remains under house arrest in Vancouver, although is free to traverse the region in the company of state-imposed guards outside of her 11:00 p.m to 6:00 a.m. curfew.

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Biden Formally Notifies Congress About US Airstrikes on Iraq-Syria Border - Letter

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden in a letter formally notified Congress about his decision to authorize airstrikes against Iran-backed militias near the Iraq-Syria border.

"At my direction, on June 27, 2021, United States forces conducted targeted strikes against facilities at two locations in Syria and one location in Iraq near the Iraq-Syria border," Biden said on Tuesday. "These facilities were used by Iran-backed militia groups that have been involved in a series of unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) and rocket attacks against United States personnel and facilities in Iraq."

Biden said the United States is prepared to take further action if needed to address future threats or attacks.

The US president said he appreciates the support from Congress in this matter, adding that he exercised his authority under US law and Article 51 of the United Nations charter, which permits countries to engage in self-defense, including collective self-defense, against an armed attack. On Monday, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said several members of Congress were notified ahead of time about Biden's decision to authorize airstrikes.

The strikes represent the second time Biden, as US president, has ordered attacks against militia in the region allegedly linked to Iran. In February, the United States launched airstrikes against Iranian-backed Iraqi militia in eastern Syria. Biden justified the February strikes on Article 51 of the UN Charter - which stipulates that all nations have an "inherent" right to self-defense.

On late Sunday, the Pentagon said that US fighter jets had struck facilities of the Iranian-backed militants – Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH) and Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada (KSS) – in the Syrian-Iraqi border region in response to attacks against American interests in Iraq. According to Syrian state television, the airstrikes likely left a child killed and three people injured.

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US Sees Ethiopia's Ceasefire Declaration as 'Positive Step' - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - The United States sees Ethiopia's ceasefire announcement in Tigray as a potential positive development if it leads to changes on the ground, State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said in a statement.

On Monday, the Ethiopian government declared an unconditional ceasefire in the conflict-torn province following the recapture of the regional capital of Mekelle by rebel forces that forced the government forces to retreat.

"The Government of Ethiopia's announcement yesterday of a unilateral ceasefire in the Tigray region could be a positive step if it results in changes on the ground to end the conflict, stop the atrocities, and allow unhindered humanitarian assistance. We are closely monitoring developments. We call on all parties to commit to an immediate, indefinite, negotiated ceasefire, so as to end the violence, restore stability to Tigray, and create a context for an inclusive dialogue that preserves the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Ethiopian state," Price said on Tuesday.

The Biden administration, Price added, also calls for the "immediate, verifiable withdrawal of all Eritrean forces from Ethiopian territory," which is necessary to sustain the ceasefire.

The United States also urges Ethiopian authorities to immediately restore telecommunication services in Tigray and "permit unhindered freedom of movement for and ensure the safety and security of humanitarian organization personnel," Price said.

Clashes in the province of Tigray erupted in November after the Ethiopian government accused the local ruling party — the Tigray People's Liberation Front — of ambushing a regional army post to hijack weapons and arm anti-government militia. The Tigray region has been occupied by the Ethiopian military since then, resulting in the fighting with the rebels and heavy civilian losses.

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Death Toll in Florida Building Collapse Rises to 12 - Miami-Dade County Mayor

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - The death toll in the collapse of the Surfside, Florida, apartment building has increased to 12, Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava told reporters.

"Very unfortunately, one additional victim was recovered, so the number of deceased is now at twelve," Cava said on Tuesday, adding that 149 people remain unaccounted for.

The condominium building in Surfside partially collapsed in the early hours of Thursday.

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Canada's Real COVID-19 Death Toll May Be Twice Higher Than Official Count - Study

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - Canada's coronavirus death toll may be two times higher than the government's official tally, the Royal Society of Canada said in a report.

To date, Canadian health officials have reported 26,238 virus-related deaths, although that number may be higher.

"Between February 1 and November 28, 2020, our study finds that the COVID-19 deaths of approximately 6,000 people aged 45 and older living in communities across Canada appear to have gone undetected, unreported or unattributed to COVID-19. This suggests that if Canada has continued to miss these fatalities at the same rate since last November, the pandemic mortality burden may be two times higher than reported," the report said on Tuesday.

The study's authors reached their conclusion following analysis of excess death reports and a rise in deaths that occurred at private residences, according to cremation data, the report said. According to the report, the unaccounted-for deaths likely occurred in low-income and high-density communities.

The report calls for better reporting of data to the state statistics agency, Statistics Canada, conducting COVID-19 tests for all fatalities, adopting the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines for estimating excess mortality and establishing a task force charged with monitoring the mortality during the coronavirus pandemic.

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IMF Board Approves \$2.5Bln in Financing for Sudan

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved nearly \$2.5 billion in financing to help Sudan implement reforms and promote higher growth, the fund said in a statement.

"The Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a 39-month arrangement under the Extended Credit Facility (ECF) for Sudan in the amount of SDR1,733.051 million (about US\$2,472.7 million or 275 percent of quota). The arrangement aims to support the authorities' implementation of their ambitious reform agenda and catalyze concessional donor financing," the fund said on Tuesday.

The IMF said the funding also aims to promote economic resilience and higher and more inclusive growth.

Sudan had completed the necessary hurdles to receive the financing from the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, the release added.

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UN Security Council Unanimously Adopts 4 Resolutions on DRC, Mali, Golan Heights

UNITED NATIONS, June 29 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council unanimously adopted four resolutions, including a document renewing the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) sanctions regime for one year.

The document, adopted on Tuesday and prepared by France, "decides to renew until July 1, 2022, the measures set out paragraphs 1 to 6 of resolution 2293 (2016) [arms embargo, travel ban, assets freeze]."

The UN Security Council introduced sanctions concerning the DRC in 2003 in response to acts of violence perpetrated by armed groups against civilians.

In another resolution, the UN Security Council renewed the mandate of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) for one year.

The council also unanimously agreed to renew until December 31, 2021 the mandate of the UN Disengagement Observer Force in the Golan Heights (UNDOF).

In addition, following up on the death of International Court of Justice Judge James Richard Crawford in May this year, the UN Security Council, in another resolution, decided to hold an election on November 5 to fill the vacancy for the remainder of the term of office.

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US Responded to Rocket Attack in Syria, Wounded 1 Enemy Combatant - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, June 30 (Sputnik) - US forces opened fire in response to a rocket attack on their base in Syria and wounded at least one of combatant, Operation Inherent Resolve spokesperson Wayne Marotto said.

Earlier on Tuesday, Marotto provided via Twitter additional details about the clash that took place the previous day and ended without the US troops sustaining any casualties.

"On June 28, US forces in Syria were attacked by multiple rockets, approx. 34 x 122mm rounds of indirect fire," Marotto said.

The US forces have the inherent right to self-defense and responded with counter-battery fire at the rocket launching positions, Marotto also said.

"One Hellfire [missile] from a UAV [unmanned aerial vehicle] resulted in one enemy wounded in action," he added.

The Defense Department reported earlier that rocket fire damaged two buildings at a US military base guarding an oil field in the eastern part of Syria. The United States maintains some 900 soldiers in the country despite the Syrian government opposition to their presence.

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US Could Complete Withdrawal From Afghanistan Within Days - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - The United States could complete the withdrawal its forces from Afghanistan within days, CNN reported citing multiple US government officials.

This week could be a critical week in the withdrawal and end of the retrograde process, the report quoted a US defense official on Tuesday.

The report said some one thousand American troops could remain in Kabul to serve as security forces for the US Embassy and the city's airport. The United States had about 2,500 troops in Afghanistan when the withdrawal process began on May 1.

Earlier on Tuesday, the top US general in Afghanistan, Austin Miller, told reporters that Afghanistan may descend into civil war after the formal US withdrawal from the country. Pundits have speculated the United States would complete its exit by July 4, but Miller did not confirm any claims.

The Taliban movement recently launched a successful offensive to seize control of some 100 regional centers, mainly in the northwest of Afghanistan.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) -

INCIDENT IN THE BLACK SEA

* Russian military jets caused "a dangerous situation" near a Dutch warship in the Black Sea last week, the Defense Ministry of the Netherlands said on Tuesday.

* The Dutch navy frigate Evertsen in the Black Sea changed course on June 24 and began to move toward the Kerch Strait, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

- * The US House of Representatives on Tuesday passed a resolution calling on Russia to immediately release from prison former US Marine Trevor Reed.
- * The United States and six allied nations began this week the annual anti-submarine warfare exercise above the Arctic Circle, NATO said.
- * Time is needed to feel calm in US-Russia relations after Presidents Vladimir Putin and Joe Biden met in mid-June, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

RYANAIR INCIDENT

- * The US Department of Transportation issued an order on Tuesday proposing restricting air travel to Belarus over the Ryanair incident, a spokesperson said in a statement to Sputnik.
- * The prohibition would allow the US government to make exceptions on a case by case basis, including for humanitarian and national security matters, the spokesperson said.
- * Russia will not take part in the preparation of a final report by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) into the Ryanair incident, Russian envoy to ICAO Sergey Gudkov told Sputnik.
- * The ICAO meeting that addressed the preliminary report into the Ryanair incident was held in a "working atmosphere" with members agreeing with the work done by the organization's secretariat, Gudkov said.
- * ICAO will not have any additional meetings on the Ryanair incident before the organization's final report is released in September, Gudkov said.

US STRIKES IN SYRIA

- * The US Defense Department is still assessing the full scope of damage caused by rocket attacks on US base in Syria's eastern Deir ez-Zor province, Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said at a briefing on Tuesday.

CORONAVIRUS VACCINES

- * The United States is about to ship some 2.5 million doses of Moderna vaccines against COVID-19 to Bangladesh on Tuesday, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said.
- * Japan plans to support Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand with an estimated one million COVID vaccine doses for each starting this week, Kyodo news reported.

RUSSIA ARRESTS FBK DIRECTOR

- * A Moscow court on Tuesday ruled to detain in absentia Ivan Zhdanov, director of the Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK) - founded by jailed opposition figure Alexey Navalny and outlawed in Russia - for refusing to implement a legal decision, court spokeswoman Fidan Gasanova told Sputnik.
- * The note to place Zhdanov on the international wanted list has been transferred to the Interpol, his lawyer Vladimir Voronin told Sputnik.
- * Turkey provided data at the Moscow's request about flights Zhdanov took, Voronin said.

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US Transport Agency Proposes to Prohibit Air Travel to Belarus Over Ryanair Incident

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - The US Transportation Department issued an order Tuesday proposing to restrict air travel to Belarus over the Ryanair incident, a spokesperson said in a statement to Sputnik.

"Today, June 29, 2021, the US Department of Transportation issued an order proposing to prohibit the sale of passenger air transportation, including air transportation on an interline basis (e.g. tickets booked through one airline that contain flights operated by multiple airlines), between the United States and Belarus," the spokesperson said.

The prohibition would allow the US government to make exceptions on a case-by-case basis, including for humanitarian and national security matters, the statement added.

The statement said that in light of the Ryanair incident, it is a US foreign policy interest to limit travel between the United States and Belarus. The order allows public comment on the matter until July 1.

On May 23, a Ryanair commercial airplane traveling from Greece to Lithuania made an emergency landing in Minsk over a bomb threat that turned out to be fake. Two passengers on the aircraft, Roman Protasevich, the founder of a Telegram channel which Belarus designates as extremist, and his girlfriend, Russian national Sofia Sapega, were detained during the stopover.

After the incident, the European Union blocked Belarus airlines from flying to the bloc and stopped carriers from its 27 nations from using Belarusian airspace.

The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has extended until September the investigation into the forced landing of a Ryanair commercial airplane in Minsk.

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Fewer Than 1 in 5 Americans Back Calls to Cut Police Funding – Poll

WASHINGTON, June 28 (Sputnik) – The US nationwide movement to defund police departments amid an outcry over officer killings of unarmed African American suspects has support from just 18 percent of US voters, a Rasmussen Reports poll said on Tuesday.

"[Fifty-two percent] of Likely U.S. Voters believe America needs to spend more on police, while only 18% think the country should spend less on police. Twenty-three percent (23%) say the current amount of funding for police is about right," a press release explaining the poll said. The survey also sought voters' opinions of recent remarks by Republican leaders in the House warning that decisions by some jurisdictions to defund their police forces have had a devastating effect on American communities. Nearly two-thirds (66 percent) agree with the statement, 24 percent disagree and 11 percent are unsure, the poll found.

In a breakdown of political affiliation, 72 percent of Republicans say America needs to spend more on police as do 38 percent of Democrats and 43 percent of voters not affiliated with either major party, the release added.

Even among Democrats, however, only 29 percent think authorities need to spend less on police, a belief shared by 10 percent of Republicans and 13 percent of unaffiliated voters, according to the release.

The survey was conducted between June 24 and 27 among 775 likely US voters and comes with a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percent.

Cuts in law enforcement budgets amid an outcry over the deaths of unarmed African-Americans have led to a spike in murders and other violent crimes in US cities, according to critics of the US movement characterized by the slogan: "Defund the Police."

However, the Biden administration lately has sought to blame rising crime on Republicans for refusing to back social programs included in Democratic budget proposals.

City police departments have also reported a surge in officer resignations and retirements in 2020 and thus far in 2021.

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S&P 500, Nasdaq Hit Record Highs Again on Bets Over US June Jobs Report

NEW YORK, June 29 (Sputnik) - Key technology and blue-chip stocks on Wall Street hit record highs for a second day in a row on Tuesday as investors bet on outsized US jobs gains for June.

The Nasdaq Composite index, which includes high-flying tech stocks such as Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Microsoft, Netflix and Google, hit an all-time high of 14,536, before settling at 14,528, up 0.2 percent.

The S&P 500 index, which groups the top 500 stocks on the New York Stock Exchange, raced to an all-time high of 4,300 before closing almost flat on the day at 4,287.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, the broadest US equity barometer on the New York Stock Exchange, also finished flat on the day at 34,292.

Nasdaq and the S&P500 rose for a second straight day as investors bet that the US non-farm payrolls report for June, due on Friday, will likely show a gain of 690,000 jobs versus May's 559,000 jobs.

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Afghanistan May Collapse in Civil War After Troop Withdrawal – Top US General

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) – Afghanistan may collapse into civil war after the full US military withdrawal is completed, commanding General Austin Miller said on Tuesday.

"Civil war is certainly a path that can be visualized," Miller, a four-star general, told a rare press conference in Kabul at US and NATO forces headquarters, the New York Times reported. "That should be a concern for the world."

Miller was speaking after a recent successful Taliban offensive seized control of some 100 regional centers, mainly in the northwest of the country.

The United States after 20 years in Afghanistan could not hope to impose a military solution as it has tried to do for almost two decades but had to seek a compromise political settlement, Miller stated.

"It is a political settlement that brings peace to Afghanistan. And it's not just the last 20 years. It's really the last 42 years," Miller said, as quoted by the Times.

The newspaper noted that US officials expect the entire withdrawal of their forces from the country will be completed in less than a week by the July 4 national holiday, Miller steered clear of committing to that date, referring only to the September 11 cutoff deadline referred to by President Joe Biden in April.

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'I See That Day in My Dreams Every Night': US D-Day Vet Shares Terrible Moments of WWII

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - The month of June marks a number of dates celebrating battle victories in Europe during the Second World War, among the most outstanding of which is the Normandy landings of the Allied troops on what is known as D-Day.

US World War II veteran Frank DeVita participated in the Allied invasion of Normandy, France on June 6, 1944, and recently shared his memories of the war.

"I go back to Europe many times, and every time I go back, I go to Normandy and there's a cemetery there and it's got all the dead bodies. And I go there every year and I cry and I cry and I cry," DeVita told Sputnik.

DeVita said he still has nightmares about D-Day, and the horrifying moments of the war.

"I dream every night, and most of the time [about] the war," DeVita said. "It brings back bad memories. And I can't sleep, and I cry during the night... to me it's that day on the beach, it's still that same day on the beach."

DeVita noted that for 70 years after D-Day, he never talked about it.

"It was too horrible, and I didn't want to bring it back to my family," he said, noting that he started talking about those tragic events in an interview with TV journalist Tom Brokaw only a few years ago, upon visiting the Omaha beach. "I didn't tell anybody. For 70 years. I never told my wife and I never told my friends. I never told anybody. It was so horrible. I didn't want to talk about it."

ENTERING THE WAR

Frank DeVita was only 16 years old when World War II hit the shores of America. At that time, he was playing baseball and was a Boy Scout.

He learned that the War broke out while listening to a football game between the New York Giants and the New York Dodgers.

"They were talking and said: The Japanese have just bombed Pearl Harbor. That's the first time I knew of it. That would have been December 7, 1941," the veteran said.

He tried to join right after the Pearl Harbor attack but was too young.

"I needed my mom's signature, but she would not sign until I graduated from high school,"

DeVita said, explaining that he was only 16 then and had to wait until he turned 18 years old to join.

The veteran went on to say that when he was old enough, he joined the US Coast Guard.

DeVita also said 17 boys from his high school decided to join the services.

"Who went to the army, who went to the Navy, who went to the Marines. And we went down and we went at the same time. 17 people from high school, from my high school," he added.

Frank pointed out that while he joined because of the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, they sent him to the Atlantic as opposed to the Pacific.

"After the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, I wanted to get even with them and it is very ironic.

When I got in the service, I went to Europe, not Japan," he said.

DeVita served on the USS Samuel Chase, which was a Navy built ship, but was US Coast Guard-manned.

"Those type of ships were called attack transport," he added. "So, they brought in the troops to Normandy. What a lot of people don't know is that it was the Coast Guard that delivered the troops into Omaha Beach and Utah Beach on D-Day for the Americans."

DeVita's father served in the US Army in World War I. And in World War II, Frank's older brother, Silvio, served as a medic in the US Third Army.

D-DAY HORRORS

"It was June 6, the invasion of Europe," DeVita recalled. "On June 6, I was on the ship and we had little boats called LCVP's [Landing Craft Vehicle, Personnel] and we went onto the beach at Normandy."

These are the famous Higgins Boats, used to bring in troops to beach landings.

DeVita explained that they had 30 army soldiers on these Higgins boats, and his job was to lower the steel ramp on the boat, allowing the soldiers to disembark and head onto the beach. In the morning, his ship brought in army soldiers from the US Army 1st Division, nicknamed "The Big Red One", and then later on in the day, the US Army 29th division.

"At 4 o'clock in the morning, we started seeing the troops and at six o'clock in the morning, we landed on the beach, Omaha beach," DeVita said. "All the transports were 11 miles from the beach. And the reason for that is that Germans had a gun called the 88. And it had a range of 10 miles. So, we stayed 11 miles out."

DeVita and two other men from the Chase were running the Higgins boat. One of the other two was the coxswain who steered the boat.

"The other guy when we landed, he put out the anchor or the rope so we could get pulled in," he said. "My job was the ramp."

DeVita's job was to drop the ramp when the boat got near to the beach and then lift it after the American soldiers left the boat.

"In the front of the boat, there was a ramp. It's like a big garage door and it's made of reinforced steel. And the ramp which you hold back when machine guns fire and single-fire they could bounce off the ramp," he said. "That was my job: either raise or lower the ramp."

On the first wave, he added, they had 30 soldiers on.

"And when I dropped the ramp, machine gun bullets that were bouncing off the ramp came into the boat and killed 15 soldiers," DeVita continued to say. "Three of them got off the boat and they made it to the beach. But as soon as they got on the beach, they were machine gunned to death."

DeVita said the Germans had 33 machine guns on the shore, while above the beach there were a lot more machine guns and 88's.

"So, we were caught in the crossfire," he said.

DeVita recalled that the sea was very, very rough, and they lost six boats from the Chase at Omaha beach, and were then left with 15.

The veteran noted that he made fifteen runs or waves, originally bringing in troops, and then around the 8th or 9th wave he was taking the dead bodies and wounded off the beach on the way back.

"After the first run, we had to go back to the ship and pick up another load of soldiers, 30 more. And then we did that, over and over and over again," he said.

DeVita said they had a lot of wounded aboard the boat.

"On the way back to my ship, there was a hospital ship and we dropped off wounded. And the dead we took back to my ship," he said.

DeVita then shared the most frightening moment of that day.

"When the machine guns started firing. It was like a swarm of angry bees all around me. I didn't want to die. I was scared," he said. "And the guy next to me died, and the guy next to me died, and the guy... at the end of the day, we lost 2,000 people."

WWII BATTLES

DeVita said after June 6th, he stayed three days off the beach and took the wounded and the dead with them. Then, they went back to the ship's home base, which was in Glasgow, Scotland.

"We lost a lot of boats, so we had to replace the boats," he went on to say. "And then we got ready for the second invasion, which was August 15th, in Southern France. Marseille."

DeVita said that he brought the US Third Division into Marseille.

"In comparison to Normandy it was a piece of cake," the veteran stressed. "Because there wasn't that many people firing at us and a lot of people that were firing at us were not Germans, they were Polish and Russian prisoners of war that were forced into the German army."

They went back to Glasgow, he added, to put the Chase in ship shape where they were told they would be going to the Pacific.

"I went to the Pacific, through the Panama Canal, I went to Pearl Harbor, and then we took troops," he said. "I didn't do the actual invasion of the Philippines, but I did bring troops into the invasion."

After the Philippines, Frank's WWII service continued in Okinawa.

"We were supposed to do the invasion of Okinawa, but unfortunately we had an accident on our boatship and we had to go back to the United States for repairs," he added. "So, we never made the actual invasion. But when we came back, that's when the Japanese had all the Kamikazes. We survived two Kamikaze attacks."

FAMILY AND FRIENDS DURING WAR

DeVita said the thoughts of his family, especially his mother's, kept him alive during the toughest times, including on D-Day.

"I didn't want to die [because] if I died, my mother would have gotten a telegram: 'Mrs. DeVita, sorry to tell you your son has died.' And that's why I stayed alive. My mom kept me alive," he said.

DeVita noted that during the War, while he was away, his mother used to go to the church and rolled bandages for the troops. He remembers fondly receiving letters and packages from back home.

"They were very nice," he said. "I probably wrote a bunch of letters back. I wanted to stay in touch with them, even though I was far away. I wanted to be with them."

DeVita also recalled actual Victory Day.

"It was May 8th. I was aboard my ship. And the notice came over the loudspeaker: the Germans surrendered," DeVita recalled. "That's how we got the news that Germany surrendered. We went bananas. We went crazy, you know, hugging one another and kissing one another and we were so happy that the war was over in Germany."

RETURNING BACK HOME

"When I got home, you know, I saw in the movies when the soldiers came home, they had a big party for them, everything else. When I got home, there was nobody there, nobody to greet me," he said.

His father who worked for the Navy was at work.

"My sister was a nurse. My little brother was out playing baseball and I couldn't find my mother," he said. "So I went to the neighbor next door; she was Italian and the first thing she said: 'you need something to eat?' So I said, 'no, I'm looking for my mom.' She says, 'Your mom, she's at the church rolling bandages,' so I went all the way to the church."

At the church he said he saw "a big circle of women and my mom had her back to me."

"The women were looking at me, they were all like 'Ooooh,'" he added. "And my mom didn't know what was going on. She turned around. She saw me and fainted right away."

Then, DeVita added, they got on the phone and called all the neighbors, friends and relatives, and then had a "big, big party."

DeVita also said he stayed in touch with friends he made during the war, and starting in 2014 went to Normandy to participate in D-Day anniversaries, until recently when his failing health has precluded his travels.

"We met some very, very wonderful people in France, and they used to take me into their house and make a big meal for me and I kept in touch with those people," he said.

Today, DeVita lives in his house and goes every week to the cemetery to visit his wife's grave.

"I have a big house. And I used to cut the lawn and plow the snow; painted every room. It takes a lot of work to maintain a house. And eight years ago, I lost the most precious thing of my life.

My wife died eight years ago. And my whole life changed," he said.

They knew each other since the age of 5. They were neighbors in Brooklyn.

"We went to kindergarten together. So I knew her all my life. I miss her. I miss her. I go every Friday to the cemetery, and I talk to her and I tell her what's going on that week. I know she doesn't hear me, but I hear me. It makes me feel better," he added.

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US House Approves Resolution Calling on Russia to Release Former Marine Trevor Reed

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives on Tuesday passed a resolution calling on Russia to immediately release from prison former US Marine Trevor Reed. A bipartisan majority of lawmakers in the House approved the resolution, which does not propose taking any action against Russia over Reed's imprisonment, but serves more as a symbolic gesture.

Reed was sentenced to nine years last July for assaulting police officers who were called to respond during Reed's drunken row with two women in a Moscow street. Prosecutors said he assaulted the officers in the police car while they were taking him in for questioning and almost caused the police vehicle to crash.

Last week, the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee advanced two resolutions calling on Russia to release Reed and another US citizen, Paul Whelan, who was sentenced to 16 years in prison for espionage.

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US Jury Convicts 4 Over Fake Applications For COVID-19 Relief Funds – Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) – A US jury convicted four California residents guilty of scheming to fraudulently obtain \$18 million in COVID-19 relief payments for nonexistent businesses, the Justice Department said on Tuesday.

"After an eight-day trial, Richard Ayvazyan, 42, his wife Marietta Terabelian, 37, and his brother Artur Ayvazyan, 41, all of Encino, were each found guilty of one count of conspiracy to commit bank fraud and wire fraud, 11 counts of wire fraud, eight counts of bank fraud, and one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering. Richard Ayvazyan was also found guilty of two counts of aggravated identity theft and Artur Ayvazyan was found guilty of one count of aggravated identity theft," Justice said in a press release.

A fourth defendant, Vahe Dadyan, was found guilty of one count of conspiracy to commit bank fraud and wire fraud, six counts of wire fraud, three counts of bank fraud, one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering, and one count of money laundering, the release said. The defendants used the loan payments totaling more than \$18 million to purchase luxury homes, gold coins, diamonds, luxury watches, designer handbags and a Harley-Davidson motorcycle, the release added.

Evidence presented at the trial showed the defendants used fake, stolen, or synthetic identities to submit fraudulent applications for the loans to the Small Business Administration (SBA), including fake identity documents, tax documents, and payroll records to execute the scheme, the release said.

The jury also found the defendants must forfeit bank accounts, items purchased and about \$450,000 in cash, according to the release. Sentencing is scheduled for September 13.

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US House Repeals 1991 Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives on Tuesday passed two bills to repeal the authorities it gave to the president to launch the 1991 war against Iraq and to fight communism in the Middle East.

A bipartisan majority of lawmakers voted in favor of HR 3261, which would repeal the 1991 Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) that allowed then-President George H. W. Bush to deploy troops to implement a United Nations resolution demanding Iraq leave Kuwait.

The legislation remains active today in what some lawmakers have called an open-ended authorization for war in the country.

The House on Tuesday also approved a bill to repeal a measure that gave the United States the authority to defend Middle Eastern countries from armed aggression by any communist country, such as the former Soviet Union.

The measure was enacted 64 years ago under the Dwight Eisenhower administration, which was concerned the Soviet Union would try to fill the power vacuum in the Middle East after the Suez Crisis.

Both measures will head to the Senate for consideration.

Lawmakers have in recent months begun an effort to repeal decades-old AUMFs, with the US House voting last week to repeal the 2002 AUMF in Iraq.

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EU Top Military Chief Urges CAR President to End Business With Wagner Forces in Country

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) – The Director-General of the EU Military Staff Vice Admiral Herve Blejean said on Tuesday that he urged the President of the Central African Republic (CAR) Faustin-Archange Touadera to end the association with the Russian paramilitary organization Wagner during a meeting last week.

"I was in the Central African Republic last week, and I saw Wagner. I saw that on the field. They are everywhere," Blejean said at a Center for Strategic and International Studies forum. "I have discussed that [Wagner presence] a lot with President Touadera last week and I told him 'you have to acknowledge it is not a viable solution... When things will be done, you will have no control on Wagner and you will have lost some sovereignty to them and it's not acceptable... you have to stop that too, you have to change your model and we can help you to do that with UN, EU, US partners, African partners...'"

According to Blejean, Wagner forces bring nothing but atrocities and human rights violations to CAR and their aim is to extract natural resources in return for their military support.

Earlier on Tuesday, United Nations (UN) Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean Pierre Lacroix said he was very concerned by the allegations of human rights violations perpetrated by Russian military personnel in CAR. On Monday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov strongly rejected the allegations in the UN report published last week.

According to the Russian Foreign Ministry, there are more than 500 Russian instructors currently working in the CAR with the authorization of the UN Security Council.

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NATO Launches 7-Nation Submarine War Games in 'High North' Off Norwegian Coast

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) – The US and six allied nations this week began an annual anti-submarine warfare exercise held each summer above the Arctic Circle, NATO said on Thursday.

"Dynamic MongOOSE is an exercise held in the High North every summer," a NATO press release said. "This year's exercise Dynamic MongOOSE is being executed off Norway and also benefit airbase support from UK and Iceland."

The exercise, which began on Monday, features two submarines, six surface ships and eight maritime patrol aircraft, the release said.

"During the exercise submarines will take turns hunting and being hunted, closely coordinating their efforts with the air and surface participants," the release added.

In addition to the United States, NATO Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Norway, and the UK joined this year's exercise, according to the release.

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Federal Reserve Tapering Must Start Once Job Market Steadies - Barkin

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - The Federal Reserve should start tapering the money it is pumping into the US economy once there is significant recovery in the labor market and ought to do so with the least drama possible, Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond President Thomas Barkin said on Tuesday.

"I have some preference for the least drama way of moving back to normal," Barkin said during a live-streamed interview with MNI Market News. "I would be ready to start tapering as soon as substantial further progress on employment has been met. I expect really solid employment figures in August and September."

Barkin's remarks came ahead of Friday's monthly jobs report for the month of June from the Labor Department. Economists polled by US media have forecast a growth of 690,000 jobs for this month to add to May's expansion of 559,000.

Barkin said the tapering should not coincide with interest rate hikes to ensure the monetary tightening was digestible to the economy.

The Federal Reserve has forecast a 6.5 percent economic growth for all of 2021 although Chairman Jerome Powell said he does not expect "full employment" - defined by a monthly unemployment rate of 4.0 percent or lower - to occur anytime soon. The monthly unemployment rate stood at 5.8 percent in May.

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South Dakota Sending National Guard Troops to Texas-Mexico Border - Statement

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem is sending 50 National Guard troops to the Texas-Mexico border to help federal, state, and local law enforcement deal with the migration crisis, the governor's office said on Tuesday.

"Today, Governor Kristi Noem announced that up to fifty South Dakota National Guard troops are being deployed to Texas to help secure the border between the United States and Mexico," the governor's office said in a press release. "This is in response to Texas Governor Greg Abbott's request for help to respond to ongoing violations of state and federal law by illegal aliens crossing the unsecured border.

The deployment will last 30 to 60 days, the release said.

The Republican-run states of Idaho, Florida, Nebraska, and Iowa have also committed to sending law enforcement officers to the Texas-Mexico border.

US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) data revealed this month that the number of asylum-seeking migrants apprehended along the southern border with Mexico in May set another record, reaching a new 21-year monthly high of 180,034. Over 929,000 migrants have been apprehended illegally crossing the US-Mexico since October, putting the Biden administration on pace to break the previous annual record of 977,509 set in 2019.

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Deutsche Bank Metals Trader Jailed For Role in Fraud Plot – Justice Department

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) – A second former Deutsche Bank commodities trader was sentenced to a year in federal prison for his role in a fraud scheme, the Department of Justice announced on Tuesday.

"A former commodities trader was sentenced Monday to 12 months and a day in prison for a scheme to commit wire fraud affecting a financial institution," the Justice Department said in a press release.

Cedric Chanu, 42, a national of France and the United Arab Emirates, was convicted by a federal jury on September 25, 2020, the release noted. Chanu, a precious metals trader at Deutsche Bank in Singapore and then London, engaged in a scheme to defraud other traders on the Commodity Exchange, it said.

"Chanu placed fraudulent orders that he did not intend to execute in order to create the false appearance of supply and demand and to induce other traders to transact at prices, quantities, and times that they otherwise would not have traded," the Justice Department said.

Chanu, together with James Vorley and other Deutsche Bank traders, defrauded other market participants through a deceptive trading practice called spoofing. Vorley was sentenced on June 21, also to a year in prison, the release said.

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Cygnus Departs Space Station With 5 Mini Satellites to Deploy Before Re-Entry Burn - NASA

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - The Cygnus spacecraft departed the International Space Station (ISS) carrying five satellites to deploy before burning up with a load of trash during a plunge into Earth's atmosphere, according to a NASA webcast on Tuesday.

Flight controllers on the ground send commands for the space station's Canadarm2 robotic arm to detach Cygnus from the ISS Earth-facing port before maneuvering the uncrewed spacecraft for a successful release, NASA said. Astronauts earlier loaded Cygnus with five miniature satellites, known as CubeSats, for deployment.

"After departure, Cygnus will deploy five CubeSats, including the Ionosphere Thermosphere Scanning Photometer for Ion-Neutral Studies (IT-SPINS), which will add to researchers' fundamental understanding of Earth's ionosphere, and the Khalifa University Students Satellite-2 (MYSat-2), which will train graduate students through the development and evaluation of its software," NASA said in an earlier press release.

The mission marked the 15th cargo delivery to the ISS by the Cygnus spacecraft since 2013. After unpacking 8,400 pounds of equipment when the spacecraft arrived four months ago, astronauts loaded several tons of trash into the freighter for disposal during a re-entry burn-up, according to NASA.

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SpaceX Satellite Internet Network Starlink to Go Global By August - CEO

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - The SpaceX satellite internet network Starlink will have global connectivity by August and will serve more than 500,000 users within a year, CEO Elon Musk said on Tuesday.

"Starting in August, we should have global connectivity, or everywhere except the poles," Musk said at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona.

Musk's comments come a week after SpaceX President Gwynne Shotwell said that the Starlink network would go global by this September, indicating that the initial date has since been moved.

Musk noted that the network is meant to primarily serve sparsely-populated regions and added that high-density areas will have a limited number of customers.

SpaceX is growing rapidly and is on the way to have more than half-a-million users within 12 months, he added.

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US Urges North Korea to Release All Abducted Japanese, Other Nationals - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, June 29 (Sputnik) - The United States is urging North Korea to release all abducted Japanese citizens and other detained nationals and allow them to leave the country, US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said on Tuesday.

"Abducting citizens of Japan and other nations and forcibly keeping them against their will in North Korea is simply wrong. It is outrageous. And it cannot continue," Thomas-Greenfield said during a United Nations symposium on the issue.

Thomas-Greenfield said the United States stands in solidarity with the Japanese people against such illegal actions.

"We call on the DPRK [North Korea] to release these individuals and allow them to leave North Korea," she said.

Thomas-Greenfield added that the United States will continue to work closely with its allies to resolve the abductions and other human rights violations perpetrated by North Korea.

Japan has said North Korea abducted 17 Japanese citizens in the 1970s and 1980s. In 2002, North Korea admitted its agents had abducted 13 Japanese citizens but denied involvement in any other disappearances.

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Search for Survivors at Collapsed Building Site in Florida Continues - Miami-Dade Mayor

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - The search for survivors at the collapsed building in Surfside, Florida, continues and number of dead in the incident remains 11, Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava told reporters on Tuesday.

"Since our last briefing [on Tuesday morning], no new fatalities have been confirmed," Cava said during a press conference.

Cava pointed out that the local authorities were able to notify each of the eleven families who lost their members in the collapsed building.

The condominium building in Surfside partially collapsed in the early hours of Thursday. The authorities have said they do not know how many occupants were in the building at the time of the incident.

According to US media reports, an engineer inspection of the Champlain Towers South condominium warned the owners of major structural damage and recommended repairs nearly three years ago.

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Israel to Send Additional Workers to Site of Collapsed Building in Florida - Mayor

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - Israel has announced that it will deploy additional personnel to assist rescue efforts at collapsed building in Surfside, Florida, Mayor Charles Burkett told reporters on Tuesday.

"The Israelis have announced that they were going to be bringing in additional rescue workers... I could tell that there was more relief in the room," Burkett said during a press conference.

On Saturday, an Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesperson said Israel has sent an aid delegation that includes Foreign Ministry and military representatives, to provide assistance in the search and rescue operations at the collapsed residential building in Surfside. The spokesperson said the delegation includes experts in engineering and social care efforts.

Burkett said that there is an overwhelming number of rescue workers at the site, including working on cranes and taking off debris.

"The work continues," Burkett added.

The condominium building in Surfside partially collapsed in the early hours of Thursday. The number of occupants in the building at the time of the incident remains unknown. Eleven people have been confirmed dead in the incident.

From: Liudmila Chernova - liudmila.chernova84@gmail.com

Subject:

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At Least 883 Civilians Killed in Myanmar Since Coup, 126 Sentenced to Death - UN

UNITED NATIONS, June 29 (Sputnik) - At least 883 unarmed civilians have been killed by security forces in Myanmar since the military seizure of power in early February and 126 have been sentenced to death, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Tuesday.

"The UN country team says there were reports that security forces have killed what we believe is a minimum number of 883 unarmed people, of whom at least 40 have reportedly died while in custody. The team also tells us that 60 children have been killed since a military takeover on February 1," Dujarric said.

"A total of 5,202 people are in detention as a result of their opposition to the military takeover. Of these people, 126 people have been sentenced to death," Dujarric said.

The United Nations in the country continues to strongly condemn the "widespread" use of force by security forces, including live ammunition, he added.

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At Least 883 Killed in Myanmar Since Coup, 126 Sentenced to Death - UN

Sputnik

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US Sees Potential Homeland Security Threats From Somalia - AFRICOM Commander

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - There are potential threats to United States' homeland security emanating from the situation in Somalia after the US military repositioned out of the country earlier this year, AFRICOM Commander Stephen Townsend said on Tuesday.

"There is really no denying that our repositioning, fairly sudden repositioning out of Somalia earlier this year has introduced new layers of risk and complexity to our mission there," Townsend said at a Center for Strategic and International Studies forum. "We see threats there to African stability, we see threats in Somalia to regional stability and we even see threats, potential threats there, to the US homeland."

The United States continues to assist its African partners to deal with security challenges in Somalia posed by al Shabab terror group, which is an arm of al Qaeda (banned in Russia), Townsend added.

Al-Shabab has led an insurgency against the Somali federal government and staged numerous attacks in an effort to impose Islamic law in the country.

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US Arrests Former Candidate for Congress Over Campaign Fund Misuse - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) – Former candidate for the House of Representatives from the US state of Massachusetts, Abhijit Das, was indicted for diverting campaign donations to pay off personal business debts, the Justice Department said on Tuesday.

"Abhijit Das, a/k/a 'Beej,' 47, of North Andover, was indicted on one count of accepting excessive campaign contributions, one count of conduit contributions, one count of conversion of campaign funds, one count of engaging in a scheme to falsify, conceal, and cover up material facts and two counts of making a false statement," Justice said in a press release.

Das was arrested Tuesday morning and will make his initial appearance before US District Court Magistrate Judge Jennifer Boal the very same day, the release said.

According to the indictment, Das was a candidate for the House of Representatives in the 3rd Congressional District of Massachusetts in the 2017-2018 election. In order to overcome a fundraising deficit, Das allegedly devised a scheme to solicit personal loans from friends and close associates in excess of the legal limit, the release added.

The indictment also alleges that Das withdrew approximately \$314,500 in funds from his campaign account and used at least \$267,000 of these funds to pay outstanding debts for his

hotel business relating to vendors, the hotel's yacht and real estate taxes unrelated to his congressional campaign, according to the release.

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US Supreme Court Backs Pipeline Builder in Land Rights Dispute

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - The PennEast Pipeline Company, whose interstate pipeline was halted by property rights disputes with the state of New Jersey, is authorized to use the federal government's eminent domain powers to acquire the needed land, the US Supreme Court ruled on Tuesday.

PennEast claimed that its Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) certificate declaring a public need for the pipeline authorizes them to exercise the federal eminent domain power to secure the needed property. New Jersey, however, asserted property interests on the contested parcels of land, and claimed sovereign immunity.

A District Court initially denied the motion by New Jersey to block the eminent domain acquisition, but the Third Circuit vacated the District Court's order, concluding that because the law did not clearly delegate the Federal Government's ability to sue nonconsenting States to certificate holders, PennEast was not authorized to condemn the property in New Jersey.

"By its terms, [Section] 717f(h) authorizes FERC certificate holders to condemn all necessary rights-of-way, whether owned by private parties or States. Such condemnation actions do not offend state sovereignty, because the States consented at the founding to the exercise of the federal eminent domain power, whether by public officials or private delegates," Justice John Roberts said in the court's written opinion.

The decision was made along a 5-4 split, with Justices John Roberts, Stephen Breyer, Samuel Alito, Sonia Sotomayor, and Brett Kavanaugh joining in the majority opinion, and Justices Neil Gorsuch, Clarence Thomas, Amy Coney Barrett, and Elena Kagan dissenting.

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American Rescue Act Makes Record Payout of \$390Bln to 135Mln People - Treasury

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - The US Treasury Department said on Tuesday that its agencies have overseen the disbursement of more than 163 million financial aid payouts totaling \$390 billion to residents this year under the American Rescue Plan Act.

"With this round of payments, the IRS and the Bureau of the Fiscal Service (BFS) have delivered more EIPs and more total direct relief than in any previous round of direct relief," the Treasury Department said.

The Treasury Department said all 50 US states saw more total relief with this round of payments than in previous rounds. More than half of this direct relief has gone to households making less than \$50,000 per year.

Another 10 percent of the payments went to Social Security, Railroad Retirement Board, and to Veterans Affairs Department beneficiaries whose incomes were not large enough to be required to file an income tax return, it said.

In total, more than 85 percent of the payments went to households making less than \$100,000 a year, it added.

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ICAO Meeting on Ryanair Incident Held in 'Working Atmosphere' - Russian Envoy

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - A Monday meeting by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) that addressed the preliminary report into the Ryanair incident was held in a "working atmosphere," with Council members agreeing with the work done by the organization's secretariat, Russian envoy to ICAO Sergey Gudkov told Sputnik on Tuesday. "The meeting took place in a working atmosphere," Gudkov said. "Council members agreed with the work done by the ICAO Secretariat."

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Additive Created With US Funds Boosts Efficacy of India's COVID-19 Vaccine - Health Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 28 (Sputnik) - The addition of a modified coronavirus developed with US funding to India's coronavirus vaccine boost protection against the more contagious Delta variant provides 100 percent efficacy against severe cases of the disease, including hospitalization, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) said on Tuesday.

"Unpublished interim results from the Phase 3 trial indicate that the vaccine has 78 percent efficacy against symptomatic disease, 100 percent efficacy against severe COVID-19, including hospitalization, and 70% efficacy against asymptomatic infection with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19," an NIH press release said.

The adjuvant, or additive, for India's COVAXIN vaccine was discovered and tested in the laboratory by the US biotech company ViroVax, with support exclusively from the NIH's National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), the release said.

Laboratory tests on blood serum showed the vaccine generates antibodies that effectively neutralize the Alpha and Delta variants first identified in the UK and India, respectively, the release added.

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Russia Will Not Participate in Drafting of ICAO Final Report Into Ryanair Incident - Envoy

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - Russia will not take part in the preparation of a final report by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) into the Ryanair incident, Russian envoy to ICAO Sergey Gudkov told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"Russia will not take part in the preparation of the report," Gudkov said.

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ICAO Will Not Hold Meetings on Ryanair Incident Until Final Report Issued - Russian Envoy

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) will not have any additional meetings in the Ryanair incident before the organization's final report is released in September, Russian envoy to ICAO Sergey Gudkov told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"Presidential instructions were given to the members of the commission of inquiry: to submit the final report on the results of the investigation on September 13," Gudkov said. "There will be no additional meetings."

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Illegal Aliens Once Removed From US Not Entitled to Bond Hearing if Caught Again - SCOTUS

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - Individuals who illegally enter the US are not entitled to a bond hearing if they have already been removed from the country once before, the Supreme Court ruled on Tuesday.

The legal question at hand was whether the respondents in the case – immigrants who were deported from the US and later reentered without authorization – were subject to provision Section 1226 or to Section 1231 of the US Code. The former is applied to those who are waiting on a removal decision and entitles a bond hearing, whereas the latter is applied when an order to remove has already been issued and does not entitle any bond hearing.

The respondents argued that because they were involved in ongoing withholding-only proceedings, which would inhibit their removal from the US, their removal decision is not entirely finalized. As such, they claim that Section 1226 applies to them, entitling them to a bond hearing. The majority of the court did not agree with their argument.

"Aliens subject to reinstated orders of removal, meaning those aliens are not entitled to a bond hearing while they pursue withholding of removal.," Justice Samuel Alito wrote in the court's decision.

The decision was not unanimous, however, with Justices Alito, John Roberts, Brett Kavanaugh, and Amy Coney Barrett joining in the majority decision, Justices Clarence Thomas and Neil Gorsuch concurred, and Justices Stephen Breyer, Sonia Sotomayor, and Elena Kagan dissented.

The majority opinion issued by the court nevertheless overturns the previous decision of the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, as well as that of a lower district court, which initially ruled in favor of the respondents.

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US Consumer Confidence Hits 15-Month High in Second Quarter - Consumer Board

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - US consumer confidence hit a 15-month high in June as Americans planned home, car and appliance purchases as well as vacations, in second quarter spending expected to further boost economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic, the Consumer Board said on Tuesday.

"Consumer confidence increased in June and is currently at its highest level since the onset of the pandemic's first surge in March 2020," Consumer Board Senior Director of Economic Indicators Lynn Franco said. "Consumers' assessment of current conditions improved again, suggesting economic growth has strengthened further in Q2 [second quarter]."

Franco said the Consumer Confidence Index grew to 127.3 in June from an upwardly revised 120 in May. Economists polled by US media had forecast a reading of 119 for this month.

Short-term inflation expectations increased in the second quarter as well, but had little impact on the purchasing intentions of consumers, Franco also said.

"In fact, the proportion of consumers planning to purchase homes, automobiles, and major appliances all rose - a sign that consumer spending will continue to support economic growth in the short-term. Vacation intentions also rose, reflecting a continued increase in spending on services," Franco added.

Consumer spending, one of the most important barometers of the US economy, accounts for about 70 percent of the country's total Gross Domestic Product.

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Russia Concerned By Some States' Stance to Launch Preventative Cyberattacks - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, June 29 (Sputnik) - Russia is concerned by the stance of some technologically advanced states that advance preventative military cyberattacks, including

against critical infrastructure, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said during a UN Security Council meeting on Tuesday.

"Of particular concern is the stance of a number of technologically advanced states to militarize the information space by advancing the concept of so-called preventative military cyber strikes, including against critically important infrastructure," Nebenzia said.

The Russian ambassador said such approaches contradict those states' commitments to prevent conflict and are viewed by Russia as attempts to use their position of strength to impose "the rules of the game" in the information technology domain.

In 2018, the US Defense Department launched the Defend Forward strategy that outlined a wide range of cyber activities seeking to disrupt adversary operations in cyberspace at their

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Biden Says to Visit Surfside Collapse Building As Early As Thursday

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said that he expects to visit the site of the building collapse in Surfside, Florida, as early as this Thursday.

"Hopefully as early as Thursday," Biden said as cited by the White House pool report.

A separate statement from the White House shortly thereafter confirmed the presidential trip.

"On Thursday, July 1, the President and the First Lady will travel to Surfside, Florida," the statement read.

The condominium building in Surfside partially collapsed in the early hours of Thursday. It remains unknown how many occupants were in the building at the time of the tragic accident.

According to US media reports, an engineer inspection of the Champlain Towers South condominium near Miami warned the owners of major structural damage and recommended repairs almost three years ago.

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United Airlines Lands Deal for 270 Boeing, Airbus Aircraft - Statement

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - United Airlines on Tuesday announced that it has concluded a deal to acquire 270 Boeing and Airbus aircraft in what is the biggest addition to the airline's fleet and the biggest order by an individual carrier this decade.

"United Airlines today announced the purchase of 270 new Boeing and Airbus aircraft - the largest combined order in the airline's history and the biggest by an individual carrier in the last decade," the airline said in a release. "When combined with the current order book, United expects to introduce more than 500 new, narrow-body aircraft: 40 in 2022, 138 in 2023 and as many as 350 in 2024 and beyond."

The order includes 50 Boeing 737 MAX 8 aircraft, 150 Boeing 737 MAX 10 aircraft and 70 Airbus A321neo aircraft. The first 737 MAX 8 with a signature interior design will begin flying this summer and the new 737 MAX 10 and Airbus A321neo will fly in early 2023, the release said. United Airlines also promises to revamp its entire narrow-body fleet by 2025 and create about 25,000 well-paid jobs by 2026 as a result of the order. United Airlines operates at present 825 aircraft and has about 24,000 active flight attendants and 12,000 pilots.

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Japan Planning Soil Sampling Mission to Mars' Moon Phobos – Reports

TOKYO, June 29 (Sputnik) - The Japanese government is considering sending a spacecraft to Mars's Phobos satellite in 2024 to obtain soil samples by 2029, public broadcaster NHK reported.

The agency said that Japan's strategic council has compiled a mid-term report on space policy on Tuesday. According to it, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) intends to launch a probe and reach one of the two satellites of Mars in fiscal 2024. It is expected that the craft with the soil collected from Phobos will be brought back for further study five years later. In addition, the government aims to develop a system which makes use of small satellites so that the government can instantly receive information about impending climate disasters. Japan is a pioneer in soil sample return missions. Last December, JAXA brought back black sandy dust in a capsule aboard the Hayabusa2 mission. The spacecraft was launched to space in 2014 and scooped up materials from the Ryugu asteroid twice before heading back to Earth.

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Lab Tests Show Vaccine Neutralizes COVID-19 Delta Variant From India – Moderna

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Sputnik) - Tests on blood drawn from recipients of Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine show the presence of antibodies effective against emerging mutations of the coronavirus, including the Delta variant first identified in India, the vaccine-maker said on Tuesday.

"Vaccination with the Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine produced neutralizing titers against all variants tested, including additional versions of the Beta variant (B.1.351, first identified in South Africa), three lineage variants of B.1.617 (first identified in India), including the Kappa (B.1.617.1) and the Delta variants (B.1.617.2)," a Moderna press release said. The laboratory titers also showed effectiveness against variants first identified in Nigeria, Uganda and Angola, the release said.

The emergence of the highly contagious Delta variant in nearly 100 countries has prompted the World Health Organization (WHO) to recommend that vaccinated individuals resume wearing facemasks, in contrast to US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) advice that masks are not needed for vaccinated people in most situations.

The variant now accounts for about 20 percent of US cases and is well on its way to becoming the dominant source of new COVID-19 infections, according to the most recent CDC estimate.

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Taiwan Aims to Secure More COVID-19 Vaccines After Spike in Infections - Foreign Ministry

MOSCOW, June 29 (Sputnik) - Taipei is using all leverage to get more COVID-19 vaccines as authorities race to avert an explosive spread of infections, Taiwan Foreign Ministry spokesperson Joanne Ou said.

The island had stood out for managing to contain drastic spread of coronavirus throughout the pandemic, but a spike of cases in May has dashed hopes that overall infection rates would remain below 10,000. Ou noted that the issues of purchasing, reselling, donating, and transporting vaccines require solving many complex and specialized tasks, the Radio Taiwan International reported, quoting the spokesperson.

"We ask the citizens of the island to be understanding. In this process, it is necessary to overcome many difficulties and resolve technical issues. As soon as the details of other countries' vaccine donations become known, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will immediately inform the public about this," Joanne Ou added.

Meanwhile, the island's health minister Chen Shih-Chung confirmed on Monday that another 410,000 doses of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine will be delivered to Taiwan on June 30. He noted that the issue of expanding the categories of people subject to vaccination will be decided by a special commission of the Health Ministry. He also said that Taiwanese companies TSMC and Foxconn received government approval to purchase the vaccine.

According to Johns Hopkins University, the death toll in Taiwan stands at 635 people, and the number of detected cases is over 14,600 people.

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Pandemic Shows Need For Joint Response to Transboundary Issues – Italian Foreign Minister

MATERA, Italy, June 29 (Sputnik) - The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance for countries to coordinate their efforts in order to resolve issues transcending national boundaries, Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio said on Tuesday, opening the G20 foreign ministers meeting.

The Italian city of Matera is hosting the one-day G20 foreign ministers meeting, during which the parties are set to discuss assistance to Africa, humanitarian issues and the post-pandemic restoration.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the necessity of coordinated international response to transboundary emergency situations. Multilateralism and international cooperation are the only efficient instruments in the face of global challenges in the interconnected world," Di Maio said.

The minister added that Italy's this year presidency in the G20 is aimed at confronting the pandemic's medical, social and economic consequences and promoting sustainable and inclusive development.

The G20 leaders' summit will take place in Rome October 30-31 of this year.